THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) No. According to the Independent Monitor report published in February 2005 there is no evidence that single men or women were especially targeted for refusal of UK visa.

(b) The report has confirmed that the overall rate of UK visa refusals has gone up from 6.5% in 2000 to 15.4% in 2003-04 for all types of applications.

(c) Government of India has been taking up with the UK Government from time to time visa issues affecting Indian nationals.

Cancellation of TEAM-9 Summit'

383. SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a summit meeting of TEAM-9 in West Africa was scheduled to be held in Senegal in May this year;

(b) whether this meeting was cancelled suddenly; and

(c) if so, the reasons for this cancellation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) No, Sir. It was proposed to have only a Ministerial meeting of TEAM-9 countries in Senegal in May 2005.

(b) and (c) The meeting could not be held as convenient dates for the assembly of all Ministers in Senegal in May 2005 could not be organised. The meeting was subsequently held on 3rd July, 2005 in Sirte, Libya.

New visa procedure for students visiting Australia

384. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Australian High Commission in Delhi has evolved a new visa procedure for students wishing to study in Australia;

(b) if so, the details thereot; and

(c) the number of Indian students in Australia and how is this expected to vary in the near future?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) Since November 1, 2004, Australia has initiated a trial of an electronic lodgement service (e-Visa). The new visa regulations now introduce Assessment Levels or ALs (depending on country and sector), which determine requirements for financial ability (abiiity to meet tuition and living costs), English language proficiency conditions and other criteria set against the Assessment Level (AL) of the country of citizenship. Countries are divided into Assessment levels 1—4. in some cases countries have different AL ratings depending upon the programme level (i.e. a different rating for undergraduate or postgraduate). Higher evidentiaiy requirements have to be met for countries falling into AL 3-4 and lower evidentiary standards for AL 1-2. The e-Visa has been initiated for education agents lodging student visas for Assessment Level (AL) 2—-4 countries.

There are currently 3 countries participating in the trial—India, China and Thailand. The trail involves 26 Indian education agencies (with 98 of their staff) who nave signed an agreement with Australia to use the e-Visa system. So far around 1800 e-Visa applications have been lodged by these agents on behalf of students. Australia has provided additional training to the education agents in this regard and they receive regular feedback on their performance.

When an application is e-lodged, it is processed by Australia's Adelaide Students Processing Centre. The staff at the Adelaide processing centre provides an e-mail service to agents in respect of any outstanding documentation and the visa decision. Students must still obtain a visa label from the Australian High Commission in Delhi before they travel. The Australian High Commission in Delhi also assists in managing the arrangements with the agents.

As part of their access agreement to e-Visa, agents must sign a code of conduct and agree to terms and conditions that apply for the lodgement of the applications. Agents can be checked and audited in respect of their applications to ensure that they do not engage in fraudulent practices.

The e-Visa system for AL1 countries has been operating since 2002 and around 90% of students from these countries use e-Visa. Australia' is anticipating that students from AL 2,3 and 4 countries will also embrace the e-Visa as well.

Around 13,300 students visas have been granted to Indian students from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, which is around 20% more than the previous year. A large part of this increase (3,315) has been students applying for a further student visa in Australia to complete a course or to start a new course, after completing their first course. The number of new initial student visas granted to students before they leave home has increased around 4% this year. Australia expects that the numbers of Indian students will continue to increase, but probably not at the levels experienced in past years. As on 31 March 2005, there were around 17,600 Indian students in Australia.

Formation of Group-4 for UNSC Seat

385. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India, Brazil, Japan and Germany have formed a new group namely "Group of 4" to ensure permanent seats for themselves in the expanded Security Council; and

(b) if so, what steps are proposed to be taken in this direction in view of the reservation of some of the influential nations?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — now being termed as the Group of Four (G-4) countries—have introduced a Resolution on UN Security Council Reform on July 11,2005 in the UN General Assembly. The G-4 Resolution, calls for an expansion of the UN Security Council from the present 15 to a total of 25 members, by adding 6 new permanent members and 4 new non-permanent seats. The G-4 Resolution is the result of intense consultations with member-States. While taking into account the various views, the G-4 resolution aims at securing the widest possible support of the UN membership. In this context, discussions between the G-4 and the African Union are currently underway.